

190.
A
L E T T E R,

ADDRESSED TO
A FEMALE FRIEND.

BY
MRS. S A G E,

The first English FEMALE AERIAL TRAVELLER;

DESCRIBING
THE GENERAL APPEARANCE AND EFFECTS
OF HER EXPEDITION

WITH
MR. LUNARDI'S BALLOON;
Which ascended from St. George's Fields on Wednesday,
29th June, 1785,

ACCOMPANIED BY
GEORGE BIGGIN, Esq.

THE SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N.
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Parliament.*

93.

W. Musgrave.



A
L E T T E R, &c.

June 30, 1785.

AT length, my dear Friend, I have accomplished my favourite experiment; our aerial flight took place on Wednesday. All is now over, and I feel myself more happy, and infinitely better pleased with my excursion, than I ever was at any former event of my life.

To any other of my female friends I might think it necessary to make an excuse, for not acquainting her with my intention previous to its taking place; but your understanding is more elevated, and your conceptions better arranged than most other women: yet I am sensible of the strength of your attachment to me, and know that, at

the distance of more than three hundred miles from the place of action, not being able to learn the event for so many days, you must have been miserable.

I considered the delicacy of your situation, and felt it highly improper to distract your mind with any fears upon my account. I was the more strengthened in this determination, by recollecting that my resolution was so firmly fixed, and my mind so strongly made up on the event, that not a human argument could have had power to dissuade me from what *you* may, perhaps, call an infatuation.

I had, besides, a stronger obligation to perform my engagement, than even my own inclination for the voyage. Mr. Lunardi had put himself to great expence, in order to gratify my wish to be of the party with him and Mr. Biggin, upon the 13th of May. The failure of that business brought upon him many illiberal reflections, respecting his intention of carrying me with him ;
and

and there being a general disposition to take up matters in the most unfavourable point of view, many persons were of opinion it was never his intention to do it; others attributed my *not* going at that time to cowardice in me. I, who knew the natural honesty of Lunardi's sentiments, was perfectly convinced that this reflection upon his character was unjust and cruel in the highest degree. I was piqued, also, that I should be suspected of a weakness, which is not in any degree a trait in my character, if I am to judge of myself. To remove both these suspicions, (if Lunardi made a further experiment), *each* of the parties were bound in honour to be ready to fulfil their engagement.

You have heard a thousand opinions on the cause of his disappointing the public at that time, and have yourself inclined to think it must have arisen from the coat of oil-colour on the Balloon, and not from any mistake in the process of filling it. I never thought myself competent to judge *how* the matter *did* happen; he failed: and the only

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ly way to extricate him from the imputation of ignorance, was to make an attempt gratis, to prove that he was right in his estimate, and that the Balloon, *properly* filled, was equal to carry up the proposed weight. To accomplish this, he went to work immediately, but found infinite difficulty in procuring a place of ascension. *That* being at last settled, he perceived it was not in his power to procure a sufficient quantity of iron; that article being very scarce in consequence of the repeated aerostatic experiments which have been made here within a short time.

This occasioned his visit to Birmingham; and the little tour he made in consequence of it. I thank you for your attention to him when at Liverpool. He speaks of *you* and *yours* with great friendship, and I find it will not be long before he pays you a second visit. I most sincerely hope his ascension from Liverpool and Lancaster will turn out to the satisfaction of those towns, and give him an opportunity of shewing the goodness of his heart; as it is his intention to dispose of the
surplus

surplus of his exhibition receipts, after his expences are paid, to charitable uses. On his return from you, he found his orders at Birmingham executed, as far as the scarcity of the commodity he wanted would admit. But, through some mistake, the iron he purchased did not reach town till Monday night, the 27th. On Tuesday all things were in regular arrangement.

I passed the day with some of our friends, whose entreaties were all exhausted, to prevail on me to relinquish my scheme; you, who saw the cool determination of my conduct, when it was intended I should accompany Mr. Lunardi and Mr. Biggin, on a former occasion, will not be surprised I could withstand their persuasions.

The auspicious morning came. I went, in company with Mr. Down and Mr. Bell, about ten o'clock, to the Rotunda, in St. George's Fields; a place built by Mr. Arnold, for the purpose of launching his Montgolfier, called the Royal George.

I am

I am truly sorry this is not likely to happen so soon as I could wish; the subscriptions not coming in so fast as is necessary for carrying on a plan of such expence. It surely is a great misfortune to have an expanded heart, when the power to indulge it is so circumscribed. I should feel great pleasure, in the ability to encourage every description of merit, and particularly in the instance I am speaking of, as Mr. Arnold has spared no expence or trouble to bring to perfection an object, which, if completed, would be beautiful and magnificent in the highest degree.

On our getting to the Rotunda, we found the Balloon about one-fourth inflated, and the business going on in a very regular manner, under the joint direction of Mr. Lunardi and Mr. Biggin; and here, I must observe, how much it is to be regretted, that they did not take this part of the business under their own care, on the 13th of May.

The

The expence of filling that Balloon, I understand, amounted to nearly four hundred pounds, and yet it was unequal to its task. It involved poor Lunardi in a great number of very unpleasant matters; and, in one particular instance, has thrown a reflection on him, which he may, perhaps, be never able to do away, in the idea of many of his former friends; that is, ingratitude to a gentleman, by whose friendship he had been much obliged, and *for* whom, I know, he has always entertained a most particular regard.

Various have been the opinions, respecting the failure of this experiment. I think it could have arisen from no other cause than some unforeseen accident in the process of filling it. Let the cause be what it may, it has been the occasion of those great expences which Mr. Lunardi has been at, to remove the reflections of ignorance, and of the mortification we all experienced, at being obliged to disappoint the most

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brilliant

brilliant assemblage of fashionable people that ever were collected on a similar occasion.

But to return to the occurrences of Wednesday. They began filling the balloon about nine o'clock; and, in order to make the process an object of gratification to the whole neighbourhood of St. George's Fields, Mr. Lunardi had raised a stage, upon which the balloon was suspended, so that every thing was distinctly seen by each anxious and curious individual.

By eleven o'clock, they had exhausted the whole of their iron, and found a difficulty in getting water, so that business was suspended for a full hour; they at length got a fresh supply, and went on at an astonishing rate. At this time the company began to assemble, and, before one, there were more than a hundred thousand persons within the circle of St. George's Fields. As I did not like to be seen, until the very moment of getting into the gallery, I sat in the coach, where I escaped those remarks

marks which I knew would naturally be made, had the *multitude* once got an idea of the woman who was about to make so bold an attempt.

The Balloon being as much inflated as was thought necessary to carry up three, if not four persons, at ten minutes after one o'clock (the time specified by Mr Lunardi for his ascension) I was conducted into the Rotunda, and placed myself in the gallery, in which were Mr. Lunardi, Mr. Biggin, Colonel Hastings (a gentleman to whom Mr. Lunardi had given a promise, that should the Balloon be capable of carrying up more than the *intended three*, he should have a place in it) and another lady whose name I do not know.

They then began to try the rising power of the Balloon, before they took in either the ballast or Mr. Biggin's apparatus for observation; and I really believe the Balloon, properly filled, would be fully sufficient to the taking up four, if not *five* persons;

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I will

I will not tell you that they shall all be so much *en-bon-point* as your friend.

The other Lady was the first to quit the gallery, which was merely an act of justice, yielding to my *prior* claim. It then could not stir. The neck of the Balloon was tied with the string of the Valve. When Mr. Biggin perceived it, he desired it might be set free. Some person officiously tied it to the cords of the net. Mr. Biggin was then under the necessity of desiring it to be cut. In short, so great was the crowd and hurry on the scaffolding, that while Mr. Lunardi and Mr. Biggin were arranging matters on one side, others were deranging them on the other. From these circumstances, we lost so great a quantity of inflammable air, that the Balloon could not take up three.

We were then four in the gallery. Lunardi, with a polite liberality that did him credit, gave up his place to Colonel Hastings. Conceive what must have been my feeling at the moment, and judge
how

how alarming my apprehensions! Uncertain, in the hurry and confusion of the instant, whether I should not a *second* time meet with a disappointment in my favourite pursuit. I however kept my resolution, and although some of the papers have said, I was agitated *almost* "to fainting," I never was more mistress of my reason. Mr. Lunardi said delays were dangerous, and immediately prepared for our departure. Colonel Hastings very reluctantly quitted the gallery, for he appeared to have set his whole soul upon the voyage; but in the hurry, as I have said before, which is almost inevitable on such occasions, several articles which Mr. Biggin intended to have carried with him, were taken from us; even the oars, which he repeatedly called for, were not brought.

At five and twenty minutes after one, Mr Biggin gave the signal for cutting the cords, and your happy sister found herself secure from disappointment, and floating
in

in the boundless regions of the air. We arose in a slow and majestic manner, forming a most beautiful object, amidst the acclamations of thousands, whose hearts at that moment appeared to feel but one sentiment, and that for the safety of two adventurers; who, notwithstanding the discouragement so recently given, by the bursting of that *identical* Balloon, and the more melancholy fate of poor Pilatre de Rozier, had fortitude enough to banish from their minds every idea of fear, or even doubt.

This I religiously declare to have been my situation. Mr. Biggin's character is too well known to stand in need of any compliment from *my* pen; but as he is the principal link of the great chain by which I now hang, and I am an enthusiastic admirer of the principles on which he appears to think and act, I cannot let this moment pass without giving you some faint idea of what I felt respecting his manly and becoming fortitude, and that at a moment which bears the strongest
affinity

affinity to the last awful breathing of this transitory existence. You'll say I begin to prose, and indeed the present turn of my mind, shut up by myself, and reflecting, every line I write, upon the idea that I was daring enough to push myself, as I may say, before my time, into the presence of the Deity, inclines me to a species of terror; but I will lay down my pen, till I can reason myself out of my melancholy, and then go on with my narrative,

I take up my employment again with great pleasure, my dear friend, and am determined to complete my letter this day, knowing that you are too affectionately attached to me to wait the arrival of the next post, for a conclusion of a matter, in which I have been so much interested. Though the retrospection gave me a little gloom just now, assure yourself that I never had, since I first took up the idea, the least apprehension of danger. My mind was so perfectly made up as to the event, that I really felt no other
 sensation

sensation than a most pure and perfect tranquillity of soul, during the whole time we had withdrawn ourselves from every earthly connection, where not a murmur was heard to break in upon our peace, but all was sweet tranquillity.

I have already told you, that we were launched about five-and-twenty minutes after one. My first attention was taken up in contemplating the extensive plain of countenance which were *up-turned* to us, in fixed and extatic attention. The pleasure and surprize I felt, was so great, that I was lost in admiration, and expressed my satisfaction by repeated salutations. At this juncture, Mr. Biggin made me remark, that we were descending fast: he looked down perpendicularly over the side of the gallery, and threw out a small bag of ballast, by which he made me observe, that we were nearly restored to an equilibrium, although we were still descending. Mr. Biggin, with a bag of ballast in his hand, watched with attention our progress towards the earth, determined to descend

scend as near the surface as safety would permit, and threw out the ballast by degrees, as the descent continued. He waited till we got so near the ground, that the people could hear him speak to them distinctly; he desired them to make way, as he was about to drop the remainder of the bag; they opened, and he flung the bag and contents among them. He made me observe, that the equilibrium was passed in our favour; and we began to ascend gradually.

Having secured the ascension, Mr. Biggin began to examine the direction in which we moved. We were crossing the Thames, above Westminster Bridge; it was then Mr. Biggin began to lace the apperture of the gallery which served to let us in, and which had been left open by mistake at our ascension. Some other matter at that moment requiring his attention, he desired I would stoop down and finish it; and thinking it better to go upon my knees to do so, gave rise to the report that I had fainted. I continued most of the time in this situation, having no table

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or feat; and being determined to pay attention to every minute circumstance that should occur; for which purpose I had taken a book with me; and Mr. Biggin, seeing my anxiety was very great, at the same time thinking it no degradation to communicate his observations to a woman, of whose understanding, I am proud to think, he had not a contemptible opinion, gave me the most pleasing and unaffected explanations you can conceive. It is from his conversation that I am enabled to entertain you with some remarks, which would have been, perhaps, beyond the compass of my own observations. Female education does not usually leave the mind capable of drawing accurate conclusions from events, which may arise in the peculiar situation I am describing; where particular effects are produced from a variety of concurrent circumstances, every one of which would appear plausible to the reasoning of the moment.

Indeed, I am convinced, that any useful observations which may hereafter take place
in

from aerostatic experiments, will be the result of impressions on a mind well versed in the general principles of philosophy. The observer, who is only equal to the narration of facts, will probably be wide of the mark in judging of causes.

When I knelt down to lace the gallery, I unfortunately put my knees upon the barometer, and broke it, so that we were entirely without a barometer; and of course Mr. Biggin could form no perfect opinion respecting our altitude. In crossing over Westminster, we distinctly viewed each part of it; we hung some time over St. James's Park, and particularized almost every house we knew in Piccadilly. The appearance of the two parks were beautiful to a great degree: we remarked a number of persons collected, but not individually; Mr. Biggin here waved his flag; perhaps in compliment to some fair innamorata, who might just at that crisis be sending up her prayers for his safe return.

The objects of my affection or esteem were, at that time, (and are still indeed) so very distant from me, and so perfectly unacquainted with my situation, that I seemed to exist but for myself.

12 Minutes before 2.

Mr. Biggin began to arrange his instruments of observation; and desired me to fasten a cord to the grapple. At this time there was only one bag of ballast left, which weighed ten pounds, and which, he said, he would preserve for our descent. It appeared to me, that we kept very near the direction of the Thames: hung, immediately over Ranelagh, which I remarked, appeared to resemble a tea caddy. Mr. Biggin made me observe the beautiful appearance of Battersea Bridge. At this time we could perceive a great number of people collected in different situations; each of these parties Mr. Biggin saluted with his flag.

6 Minutes

6 Minutes before 2, Ther. 59, hyg. 3, direction West.

The balloon turned round its axis in about 15 seconds, three several times: I complained to Mr. Biggin that I had lost sight of some particular objects which I was contemplating with great pleasure: he told me that he would endeavour to stop, and with the speaking trumpet rowed against the motion; it stopped instantaneously, and then took a motion on its axis, in the same direction that he moved the trumpet, which he again changed, and we proceeded in a direct line.

4 Minutes before 2, t. 52. h. 6. W.

The balloon now began to dilate, and we sensibly ascended; Mr. Biggin bid me throw out small bits of paper, which ascertained our motion exactly.

4 Min. after 2, t. 45, h. 13, W.

The Balloon dilated, and we ascended rapidly: we now very comfortably sat down, ate some ham and chicken, and drank a glass of Florence wine; threw out the bottle,
and

and Mr. Biggin saw it above twenty seconds in falling. Vapours began to appear under us.

6 after 2. t. 40. h. 12, W.

Balloon completely dilated. Inflammable air began to escape fast from the apperture. Mr. Biggin said we should soon pass some clouds, and that I was to expect some wet. I was very cold for above five minutes, and felt a little difficulty in respiration; but it was not an unpleasant sensation.

The cold had not the same effect upon Mr. Biggin; but his ears were affected with an unusual sensation; this he seemed to think proceeded from the rarefaction of the air contained in the cellular organs, which extended the tympanum, particularly, as on the descent he found himself a little deaf, which seemed to indicate that the condensation of the air, and consequently the relaxation of the tympanum, had taken place. The Balloon frequently turned on its axis, which pleased us very much, as it presented the whole

whole face of the country, in various points of view.

15 after 2, t. 37, h. 10, W.

Inflammable air ceased to escape : that was then the time of our highest altitude. Paper flung out descended with nearly its usual force on earth ; that is, gently. Mr. Biggin tried the magnet frequently, but it had no variation. We here passed through a good deal of small fleety snow, which did not appear to descend, but floated about us, and that pretty thick. We had some white clouds under us in lines, and we saw the objects on earth through them as if through gauze. We kept close to the direct line of the Thames, and consequently crossed its meanders frequently. Apparently we were here stationary for three minutes. Mr. Biggen flung out a roll, and saw it falling about a minute, and a bottle empty about the same time, which his sight lost whilst falling.

Mr. Biggin tried a small bell, with an intention of observing any local difference of sound ;

found ; but the effect was as usual. He then prepared an electrical experiment, with an electrometer, armed, as he expressed it, at the bottom with silver wire, terminating in a great number of points, by which he meant to form a conductor. On applying a stick of sealing wax, which he had previously rubbed on his coat, the pith balls in the electrometer visibly separated ; and on exposing it as far as the arm could extend, to a cloud we were then passing, the separation increased, and the balls diverged to the side of the glass : he then dried a glass, and after some friction applied it to the ball, which, immediately on the application, united. From this observation he told me his conclusion ; which was, that the electricity of that cloud was negative.

24 after 2, t. 39, h. 13, N. N. W.

The Balloon began to collapse and descend. From this time, Mr. Biggin was employed in preparing for our descent, which the papers gave us notice we were
doing

doing rapidly. Mr. Biggin threw out the anchor and line, leaving only about five yards in the gallery, in order that he might ease off the check, threw out our eatables, and other useless things ; as we still descended rapidly, he kept the ballast in one hand and the anchor line in the other. He spoke with the trumpet to some hay-makers in a field.

When the grapple was within a hundred yards of the earth, he threw out the ballast ; the grapple soon after reached the ground, and on the balloon's touching the earth, he rolled off the check with the cord. The instant the grapple felt the force of the Balloon it slipped ; and we continued skimming and grazing the earth. It was then I hurt one of the tendons of my foot, by its striking against a piece of broken iron, which was not to be avoided, from the astonishing power the wind had upon the Balloon at our descent.

The first assistance that presented itself to us, was a single man, who got hold of the
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gallery ;

gallery ; but he was of no service, as he was laid flat on his face. The people soon collected to the number of six, but the wind was so high, as to pull them all after the Balloon : by the addition of two or three more we were completely stopped. I got out.

After a delivery of *two hundred pounds of human weight*, Mr. Biggin intended furnishing himself with almost an equal weight of ballast, and after leaving me in the care of some of the hospitable people of the neighbourhood, he meant to ascend again, and continue his voyage as long as the Balloon would carry him. It was then that a little trait of female weakness, I confess to you, crept into my heart. I wished *him* not to proceed further than I could accompany him. I envied him a lengthened journey ; but as sentiments which are not natural make but flight impressions, I soon recovered my own ; and as it appeared to be so much wished by Mr. Biggin to proceed, I bade him adieu with infinite pleasure ; and only looked forward to his safe return. A
number

number of concurrent circumstances willed it might not be so. The place where he descended is a large common field, near Harrow on the hill: the crop upon it was nearly got in, some beans only remaining. The master of the fields is one of those beings, who, though they bear the *external* marks of humanity, have very little of the real character in their soul. And so you'll say when I tell you, that upon seeing a *trifling* injury done to his property, he was abusive, and savage to a great degree. The greater part of his companions were silent; and had it not been for some genteel persons who came up to us, I make not a doubt but the Balloon would have been sacrificed by these unfeeling people.

Much time was not wasted, and no ballast could be got, for we had not a spade with us, nor could we procure one. To make the matter worse, some of the gentlemen who had surrounded me seeing that I could not walk, went to Mr. Biggin, and told him that I was greatly hurt. *Supposing* this to

be the case, he immediately determined to give up the idea of going further; (and when after having accepted a very polite invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Wilson of Henwell Green and a large circle of their friends, to dine with them at their beautiful little retirement), I went to take my leave of Mr. Biggin, he had begun to let out the gas.

About this time the kind master of Harrow School, and almost the whole of his charge, had got up to Mr. Biggin. The attention they paid, to assist Mr. Biggin, is not easily to be described to you; and he tells me it was principally owing to them that the Balloon was saved from destruction.

After Mr. Biggin had sent off the Balloon in a cart to town, he accompanied Mr. Drury and his family to Harrow, where he was received with that polite attention which is due to amiable merit. One circumstance, which I will not suffer to pass unnoticed, as it shews the charming ingenuofness of well educated young minds; The young gentlemen

tllemen conceiving that the damage which the farmer complained of had been occasioned by them, when they were assisting Mr. Biggin, very handsomely made a subscription purse, and sent it in to Mr. Drury, with their request that they might be suffered to consider themselves the properest persons to pay the man for the trespass which had been committed upon his property! Was not this a very handsome compliment? Mr. Biggin felt it with great pleasure.

I was conducted by the family I have mentioned to their house, which was nearly a mile from the spot I have been speaking of. There was a large party there, and were I to tell you the many flattering attentions that were shewn me, you would think me vain indeed. It is enough to say, that I did then, and ever I hope shall, feel the strongest sense of their politeness.

Here I left behind me a bottle of harts-horn, which I had taken with me for fear of fainting

fainting; but as I never had the least idea of doing so, it had not been opened. Several other trifling things I distributed amongst the young girls who came to pay me their rustic compliments.

There were several gentlemen upon a dinner visit to Mr. Wilson, whose names I do not recollect, except a Captain Thomson of Dulwich, and a Mr. Brook, who were the two most particularly attentive in assisting me to Mr. Wilson's.

Mr. Biggin, in parting with me, intended to come to me immediately after dinner; but it was impossible he could get from them; he therefore sent a chaise for me at eight o'clock. Captain Thomson would not set off for town until he knew my fate. I left this amiable family about nine o'clock, and reached Harrow about ten, where I was received by some friends who had rode after us; but from our changing our course so often, they had little idea of the place where we descended,
and

and less of the abode of Mr. Wilton. We left Harrow about half after ten o'clock.

No words can describe the expressions of joy, and the acclamations of applause that we were saluted with at parting with these fine young men. Not satisfied with giving us repeated cheers at Mr. Drury's door, they followed us out of the village, and placing themselves at certain distances on the road, reiterated their good wishes for our safety, until we lost the sound.

We arrived about twelve o'clock in perfect health and spirits, and I was received by a numerous party of friends with sincere marks of joy. The pain of my foot has confined me to my bed all day, and I have had sufficient leisure to write you this long letter.

The door is never quiet a single instant, and I suppose when I go out I shall be as much looked at as if a native of the aerial regions had come down to pay an earthly visit.

Remember

Remember me to all you value most; and
believe me, whether in heaven or earth, I
shall be always,

Most affectionately yours,

L. A. S A G E.

No. 10, CHARLES-STREET,
COVENT-GARDEN.



1391. d. 47.